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ABSTRACT

Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of the medieval carnival--a time when life is turned upside down, social hierarchies are lifted, and the lines between performer and participant are blurred--provides a useful framework for understanding both liberatory and potentially threatening aspects of writing workshops in elementary schools. An experimental writing workshop in the third grade consisted of three parts: (1) an open meeting, lasting 5 to 10 minutes, during which students were instructed in a traditional manner (students increasingly protested this part of the routine); (2) free writing time lasting 30 minutes, during which students were free to write what they wished as they moved about the room to be with other students; and (3) sharing time lasting 10 minutes, during which students could read their texts in front of the class. Like participants in a carnival, children experienced a blurring of performer and spectator roles in the workshop--there were no active producing authors separated from passive consuming readers. Instead, children moved in and out of the roles of writer and audience. In addition to transformed social relations, writing workshops encourage participants to take up a playful, familiar relation to the world. However, there is reason for concern about the way that children treat each other in a carnival atmosphere. An important criticism that Stallybrass and White (1986) level at Bakhtin's work on carnival--namely, that it embraces an uncritical populism--also sticks to the writing workshop advocates. (Contains 44 references and 14 notes.) (TB)

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# Writing Workshop as Carnival: Reflections on an Alternative Learning Environment

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The writings of Russian literary theorist and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin have become increasingly popular among scholars of language, meaning, and literature, within and without the education community. Relatively ignored within the education community, however, is Bakhtin's work on carnival. For Bakhtin, the carnivals and popular festivals of the Middle Ages and Renaissance were extremely important alternative social contexts that could teach us much about how to bust open and transform traditional, closed discourses. In my paper, I use the lessons of Bakhtin's carnival to critically examine a progressive, alternative learning environment in schools--the writing workshop.

Typically, children write (compose) very little in schools. The writing that is done is tightly controlled by the teacher who initiates writing tasks; determines audience, purpose, and format for the writing; and acts as the sole audience and evaluator. In such situations, students' technical competence to write, and their motivation to use writing in ways that enrich and transform their lives, suffer (Applebee, 1981; Doyle, 1986; Florio-Ruane & Dunn, 1985). Traditional writing instruction functions, then, much like other traditional forms of pedagogy to silence students, deny student experiences and meanings, and alienate students from the teaching and learning they encounter in schools (Freire, 1970, 1985; Giroux, 1988; Waller, 1932).

In contrast, writing workshop approaches to the teaching of writing emphasize providing opportunities for children to engage in and practice the craft of writing (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986, 1991; Graves, 1983; Murray, 1985). A central theme within such approaches is increased student control over writing processes and texts--students have wide powers to determine the topics, audiences, purposes, and forms of their texts. Such control is in the service of student voice. With the support of the teacher and numerous opportunities to collaborate and share texts with peers, children are supposed to gradually become more and more able to express themselves in their writing.

Writing workshop approaches are increasingly popular. They are also dramatically under-theorized--or, perhaps more accurately, they have been theorized in ways that do not give us access to crucial problems and issues attending such literacy practices in schools (Berlin, 1988; Dressman, 1993; Gilbert, 1989; Willinsky, 1990). My strategy in this paper is to portray the writing workshop as a form of carnival. This enables me to articulate problems that have not been confronted in the how-to books of workshop advocates and in research on teaching and learning writing. At the same time, the portrayal of workshops as carnival helps me to affirm what I take to be the core of workshop commitments--a vision of children writing themselves and their worlds on the page, moving, being heard, in a place that has habitually constrained their voices and bodies to teacher questions, to desks.

My paper is grounded not only in the writings of Bakhtin and workshop advocates, but also in my own teaching and research with third graders in a writing workshop (Lensmire, 1994). I discuss this work in the following section.

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## Background and Contexts

Throughout the 1989-90 school year, I taught writing five days a week in Grace Parker's[1] third grade classroom using a writing workshop approach, and researched teaching and learning in the workshop as a participant observer. As a teacher, I wanted my students to "come to voice," both in the sense of a private exploration and ordering of experience in the expression of a unique self, and the sense of greater public participation in the cultural work of naming and renaming the world and their places within it (hooks, 1989). As a teacher-



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researcher, I wanted to study what happened when my students and I went about teaching and learning writing in ways that transformed typical classroom social relations and work. I brought interpretive research assumptions and methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Erickson, 1986; Hammersly & Atkinson, 1983) to this work, and collected the following types of data:

Fieldnotes. Included general narratives of the day's teaching, as well as reflections on specific pedagogical and methodological problems and issues.

Teacher and classroom documents. Included lesson plans, lists of rules and procedures for workshop, forms, notes to students and parents.

Audiotapes. Starting in October, I taped class sessions and writing conferences with children in order to do close analyses of discourse in various workshop situations.

Student interviews. Twenty-four of twenty-seven children in the class participated in interviews conducted at the end of the school year by colleagues of mine. Interviews focused on the sense students were making of the writing workshop, and explored children's relations with one another and with their teachers, and how these relations influenced their writing.

Student writing. Students' written work was photocopied throughout the year. These texts were essential for analyzing the topics and genres children pursued in their writing, and how topics and genres were related to the immediate social context.

I taught in a school that served a largely middle class, suburban community. Children who lived in a nearby trailer park, inhabited primarily by working class families, also attended the school. As I worked with these children across the year--as well as watched them play on the playground, vote for student council representatives, decide who to sit by in the cafeteria--I began noticing patterns of association among children that divided them along gender and social class lines (if we take the ten foot fence separating the children living in the trailer park from those living in the surrounding community as a rough social class line).[2]

In the larger study, I focused on how this divided, stratified peer culture asserted itself within our workshop, and shaped the production and sharing of children's texts. I drew on the language and literary theories of Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and Kristeva (1986) to analyze children's texts in relation to the social contexts of their production. For Bakhtin, texts respond to preceding and anticipated texts and are sensitive to audience and social context. Texts are 'dialogic,' in that they are responsive to others and to their texts. In my analyses, I did interpretations of children's texts where peers (not only teachers) were important audiences, and in which children drew not only on their conversations with teachers and their readings of books, but also the words, meanings, and values of their peer culture to construct their texts. In other words, I placed young writers in a social context in which peers were important audiences and sources of material, in order to investigate how peer culture intersected with the official work of the writing workshop.

In this previous work, I was deeply influenced by Bakhtin's analyses of speech and writing. Here, I turn to Bakhtin's (1984a, 1984b) analysis of carnival--especially as developed in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *Rabelais and His World* (PDP and RAW in what follows)--in order to extend my earlier work, and theorize the teaching and learning of writing in schools more adequately.

Bakhtin championed carnival because he saw it as a social sphere that embraced freedom and equality, and that created possibilities for learning and positive change. I summarize his analysis of carnival in the next section.

## Bakhtin on Carnival

Bakhtin repeatedly characterized carnival as a 'second life' of the people. For Bakhtin, the carnivals and popular festivals of the Middle Ages and Renaissance conferred "the right to emerge from the routine of life, the right to be free from all that is official and consecrated" (RAW, p. 257). This second life of the people was both unofficial and antiofficial--unofficial, because the playful, fearless spirit of carnival loosened the grip of established norms and relations, and allowed alternatives to emerge in their place; antiofficial, because this same carnivalistic spirit engendered and supported the criticism and mockery of the official social order and ideology.

I will emphasize four features of Bakhtin's carnival.[3] The first is the *participation of all* in carnival. Carnival, for Bakhtin, is not a spectacle, not something performed by some and watched by others. Instead, the line between spectator and performer is blurred, as in the Roman carnival described by Goethe (1970) in his *Italian Journey*. In it, participants move in and out of processions, mock battles with confetti, games, verbal duels, and exaggerated reenactments of the body's struggles with birth and death. For Bakhtin, it is only later, with the encroachment of the state on popular festive life and the movement of festive life from the marketplace to the private household, that the people's participation in carnival shifts toward spectatorship--carnival becomes a parade, and the carnival spirit is "transformed into a mere holiday mood" (RAW, p. 33). The full-bodied carnival Bakhtin is interested in features an active, universal participation, is a "pageant without footlights."

> Carnival is not contemplated and, strictly speaking, not even performed; its participants live in it, they live by its laws as long as those laws are in effect; that is, they live a carnivalistic life. (PDP, p. 122)

One of carnival's laws--and for Bakhtin perhaps the most important--is the seeming obliteration, during carnival, of the official, established social order, and "all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette" connected to it (PDP, p. 123). In the second life of carnival, behavior, gesture, and discourse are freed. With the suspension of social hierarchies and conventions, a joyful 'disorderly conduct' flourishes.

> Members of all social strata mix, joke and cavort in a mood of carefree abandon and 'universal good humour' . . . . Young men and women, each dressed in the clothes of the opposite sex, interact in a scandalous and provocative manner. Mock officials parade through the crowd, accusing people of horrible crimes and threatening them with arrest and punishment, which only elicits howls of laughter from the populace. (Gardiner, 1992, p. 44)

Carnival is life turned inside out and upside down. This disruption of life's routine, and especially the temporary abolition of powerful social hierarchies, allows participants to experience relations with each other and the world that are unavailable to them in everyday life.

A second important feature of carnival, then, is *free and familiar contact among people*. Physical and social distances between people are suspended in the jostling crowds. Constrained, coercive relations give way to ones based in freedom and equality. For Bakhtin, carnival is a context in which people take up and work out, even if only temporarily, new relations with others. Participants experience "in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, *a new mode of interrelationship between individuals*, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life" (PDP, p. 123; author's emphasis).

But it is not only social relations that are transformed in carnival, not only people who get mixed and combined in disorderly ways. For Bakhtin, a 'free and familiar' attitude spreads

over everything, as values, ideas, events, things, are wrestled from their ordinary places in thought and practice, and rearranged, and perceived anew. New connections are made, ideas and objects seen in a new light. Carnival participants take up new relations not only with the people around them, but with their world. A third feature of carnival is a *playful, familiar relation to the world.*

For Bakhtin, this playful stance was signaled in numerous carnival practices, such as clothes being worn inside out, or underwear as outer wear; in countless gestures, such as walking backward, standing on your head, showing your backside; the use of spoons and pots and other household objects as weapons of war in mock battles; and the creation of useless objects, such as buckets and barrels without bottoms. Bakhtin warns against passing too quickly over these seemingly frivolous activities, and sees great import and possibilities in carnival's playful manipulation of the everyday world:

> It is a gay and free play with objects and concepts, but it is a play that pursues a distant, prophetic goal: to dispel the atmosphere of gloomy and false seriousness enveloping the world and all its phenomenon, to lend a different look, to render it more material, closer to man and his body, more understandable, and lighter in the bodily sense. (RAW, p. 380)

As the weight of the established social order and official ideology is lifted in carnival, unofficial and antiofficial discourse and activity emerge. The fourth feature of Bakhtin's carnival is this strong antiofficial current in the carnival sea, what Bakhtin calls carnival abuse or *profanation*, and that is expressed for him in the loud blasphemies, obscenities, and parodies that sound in the carnival square. Bakhtin is at pains to emphasize that carnival abuse is not personal invective aimed at other individuals. Instead, profanation has as its target the system of practices and ideas that oppress the people. Carnival abuse is directed, by the folk, at traditional authority and its "old truth," which are represented by "a Mardi Gras dummy, a comic monster that the laughing crowd rends to pieces in the marketplace" (RAW, p. 213).

The purpose or project of carnival abuse, however, is not purely negative. For Bakhtin, profanation is profoundly ambivalent--that is, both negative and positive, both destructive and regenerating. Carnival abuse kills the old so that the new can be born. This ambivalence is clearly seen in one of the most important rituals of carnival--the mock crowning and decrowning of the carnival king. In this ritual, a carnival king is crowned, only to later fall prey to carnival abuse in the decrowning, as he is stripped of his regal vestments, crown, and other symbols of authority, and subjected to ridicule and beatings. For Bakhtin, this ritual expresses perfectly the ambivalence of carnival abuse, as well as the pervasive ambivalence of the carnival spirit.

> The ritual of the decrowning completes, as it were, the coronation and is inseparable from it (I repeat: this is a dualistic ritual). And through it, a new crowning already glimmers. Carnival celebrates the shift itself, the process of replaceability . . . . Under this ritual act of decrowning a king lies the very core of the carnival sense of the world--the pathos of shifts and changes, of death and renewal. Carnival is the festival of all-annihilating and all-renewing time. (PDP, pp. 124, 125)

This, for Bakhtin, was the lesson taught in carnival: things change. And for the folk, for everyday people wore down by oppressive conditions, this was a hopeful lesson. Carnival loosened the binds of official social relations and ideology, and enabled people to take up new relations with each other and the world. In carnival, the people laughed at ideas and practices supposed to be universal and eternal, and saw them for what they were--partial and contingent. In this space, in this second life of the people, they could glimpse and experience, temporarily,

a better future.

I have briefly characterized Bakhtin's carnival by pointing to four important features. In the next section, I examine the writing workshop as a form of carnival, in order to highlight what I take to be positive aspects of workshop life. I argue that active participation, free and familiar contact among people, and a playful, familiar relation to the world are, as in carnival, prominent features of writing workshops, and discuss how these characteristics manifest themselves in the writing of workshop advocates and the lives of students and teachers in school. Profanation, the final feature of carnival discussed above, is not a prominent characteristic of workshops--I take this up later in the paper, when I examine shortcomings in the theory and practice of workshop approaches.

## Workshop as Carnival

### Affirmations

The active participation of all is a prominent theme in workshop literature.[4] In the opening sentence of one of the classics of workshop advocacy, Graves (1983) asserts: "Children want to write. They want to write the first day they attend school" (p. 3). But instead of encouraging and sustaining this active engagement with writing, traditional school practices actually deny participation, demand passivity, and produce student resistance. Thus, workshop approaches emphasize providing students with the opportunity to actively explore and learn about writing by writing. The primary strategy of these approaches is to grant students increased control (or 'ownership') over their own literate activities. According to Graves, writing workshop teachers

> Want the child to control, take charge of the information in his writing. Their craft is to help the child to maintain control for himself. That is the craft of teaching. They stand as far back as they can observing the child's way of working, seeking the best way to help the child realize his intentions. (p. 6)

Increased student control transforms traditional social relations and writing tasks in the writing class, and is intended to help students regain their interest in and commitment to expressing themselves in print.

In the workshop I set up with my third graders, this active participation--as well as the second feature of Bakhtin's carnival, free and familiar contact among people--can be seen in the primary activities of different parts of our daily routine.

Our workshop had a three-part routine. The first part--*the opening meeting*--lasted approximately 5-10 minutes and was modeled after what Calkins (1986) calls mini-lessons. I used this time to teach, usually in a whole-class situation, the procedures and norms of the workshop, and aspects of the craft of writing. This part of the routine placed students in a fairly traditional, passive student role. Interestingly enough, once students got used to the relative control they exercised in other parts of the workshop routine, they actively resisted the opening meeting. There were persistent complaints about the opening meeting--students claimed that it wasted *their* writing time, and called the opening meeting, among other derogatory things, the "opening infinity." There was even a student petition circulated in the workshop that called for the opening meeting to be shortened. By March of that school year, we were calling the opening meeting the "opening minute," and I was consciously working to keep it short (Fieldnotes, 3-12-90).

The second part of the routine, lasting approximately 30 minutes, was *writing time*. This was the part of the workshop where children exercised the greatest control over their own

work and movement. This autonomy was to serve their writing, allow them to engage in topics and stories that they found meaningful, and to engage their peers and me in ways and at times that suited their work and the problems they faced as they wrote. If a child needed to talk with someone about an idea she had for the revision of a story, for example, she had the freedom to do so. She could go to her peers, or, if I was not talking to another child at that moment, to me (or Grace, the regular classroom teacher, who often worked with us in the workshop). Primary activities for children during this time included brainstorming, drawing, drafting, revising, and editing texts; conferencing with peers and the teacher; publishing selected texts (including putting together books and illustrating stories); and reading. Children made choices during this time as to what they wanted to work on, with whom, for how long. My primary activity was talking with children about their writing. I helped them identify important stories, revise, and get their drafts ready for typing and publishing.

The final ten minutes or so of the workshop routine was *sharing time* (modeled after Graves and Hansen's [1983] "author's chair"). Sharing time was one of two primary ways for children's texts to go public within the classroom, to reach a larger audience than those in teacher and peer conferences. (The second was our workshop library--a few shelves at the back of the room where we housed children's published pieces. Children donated their books to the library for certain amounts of time so that other children could check them out and read them during writing time and other parts of the school day.) During sharing time, one or more children read their texts in front of the class, and then received response from classmates and adults in the room. Sometimes children shared finished pieces--typed, illustrated, bound between cardboard covers. Other times, children used sharing time to get help with planning or revising earlier drafts of texts.

Unlike traditional classrooms, our writing workshop did not lock children into passive spectator roles. Like participants in carnival, children experienced a blurring of performer and spectator roles in the workshop--there were no active producing authors separated from passive consuming readers. Instead, children moved in and out of the roles of writer and audience. In both sharing time and the workshop library, child writers and their texts occupied spaces typically reserved for adults and official texts: In sharing time, the storytelling child replaced the teacher at the front of the room; in the workshop library, the child's book replaced the adult-authored-and-selected book. And in contrast to traditional seating arrangements that bind children to desks and to constrained relations with each other--peer relations that flourish only at the edges, or in the absence, of the teacher's gaze (Erickson and Shultz, 1992)--writing time permitted movement, and provided children with access to each other. At any given moment during writing time, children were clustered around desks, huddled under the bookshelves, or on the move to a conference with friends. Children could draw close to one another, and engage each other in familiar ways.

Writing workshop approaches encourage free and familiar contact among children. They also seek to lessen physical and social distances between teachers and students. As was suggested above in my discussion of our workshop routine, the teacher in the writing workshop is often *among children*, rather than in the front of the room. In my experience, this led to possibilities for personal, positive contact with children, during class time, that I seldom experienced when teaching in more traditional ways.[5] In addition, workshop approaches encourage transformed teacher-student relations in their conception of teacher response to children's texts. I have treated teacher response in writing workshops in some detail elsewhere, and will not provide an extended discussion here (Lensmire, 1993). I will note, however, that a major concern of workshop advocates is helping teachers avoid falling into a typical classroom discourse that affirms the traditional social hierarchy between teacher and student, and silences students (Cazden, 1986).

In response to the pervasive role of teachers as evaluators of student writing for grading purposes, workshop approaches emphasize that teacher response should seek to help students

realize their own intentions in text. The teacher, once the sole initiator and audience/evaluator of student writing, now *follows the child* (Graves, 1983, p. 103) in her writing processes, watching carefully for ways to encourage, support, model, and coach, at appropriate times, through response. Calkins (1986) would have teachers draw close[6] to students and become a genuine audience for them, an audience that is interested in what young writers have to say.

> Our first job in a conference, then, is to be a person, not just a teacher. It is to enjoy, to care, and to respond. We cry, laugh, nod, and sigh. . . . Sometimes that is enough. Sometimes the purpose of a conference is simply to respond. Other times, if the moment seems right, we try, in a conference, to extend what the youngster can do as a writer. (p. 119)

Writing workshops support the active participation of children in writing by promoting social relations among children and with teachers that serve the needs of young writers. Ideally, these social relations are characterized by free and familiar contact among workshop participants, as children are given access to each other as audiences and collaborators, and teachers seek to transform hierarchical relations with students through a different sort of teacher response.[7]

In addition to transformed social relations, writing workshops support the active engagement of children with writing through the transformation of school writing tasks. And in this transformation of task, writing workshops, like carnival, encourage participants to take up a playful, familiar relation to the world. Workshop approaches make at least three moves that support this playful stance by young writers.

First, workshop approaches reject traditional school writing tasks--they reject the grammar and usage textbook with its gloomy exercises, as well as tightly-controlled teacher assignments. Second, writing workshops grant students wide powers to determine the topics, audiences, purposes, and forms of their texts, and seek to support students in their choices. Children choose what they want to write about. Rather than confront an alien, imposed world, children are asked to explore their own familiar worlds, and to do it in their own language--workshop advocates want "the schoolyard talk of children to become the poetry and prose of the classroom publishing house" (Willinsky, 1990, p. 200). As Atwell (1987) notes, workshop approaches have strong student-centered commitments in that "individuals' rigorous pursuit of their own ideas is the course content" (p. 41). But this 'rigorous' pursuit is not necessarily 'gloomy' or 'serious'--what are brainstorming, friendly conferences, Elbow's (1973) "free writing," but strategies for replacing an all-too-serious school stance to ideas and work, with a playful, familiar one?[8]

The final move writing workshops make to support a playful, familiar stance to the world is to bring *writing itself* close to students, and demystify it. Rather than experience the typical, alienating school task of producing texts for evaluation purposes, children experience what it means to engage in the craft of writing, continuously and close up. They explore their experiences and world through drafting and revision, through seeing the effect of what they have to say on multiple audiences in the workshop. The process of writing and the role of writer are not kept at a distance, not denied children, in the writing workshop. And through writing, children begin to give shape and order to their world:

> By articulating experience, we reclaim it for ourselves. Writing allows us to turn the chaos into something beautiful, to frame selected moments in our lives, to uncover and to celebrate the organizing patterns of our existence. (Calkins, 1986, p. 3).

I have pointed to several ways that writing workshops embrace features of Bakhtin's carnival. Writing workshops encourage free and familiar relations among workshop

participants, and a familiar relation to the world by child writers, in order to support children's active engagement with writing in the classroom. Thus, it seems reasonable to compare writing workshops to carnival--a reasonableness that is only strengthened if you have ever actually experienced the noise, laughter, and incessant movement of active children in a writing workshop.

Having asserted this, however, I must immediately admit that if workshop is carnival, it is a rather pale, subdued one--a carnival without bite, without the critical, radical edge of Bakhtin's carnival. In the following section, I contrast workshops to carnival.

An Orderly, Individualistic Carnival

Bakhtin emphasizes that a central aspect of carnival is its struggle against the official social order, its attempt to meet and disable established social relations and ideas with laughter, frank speech, and, especially, carnival abuse or profanation. Bakhtin's carnival has a strong antiofficial commitment that is simply absent from the writing workshops promoted by Graves, Calkins, Atwell, and Murray. These workshop advocates *do* provide important critiques of traditional school practices, but seldom link these critiques and their proposals for classrooms to broader societal problems and struggles for change (Berlin, 1988). Workshop advocates make the teacher responsible for sharing a technical, craft curriculum with students that is aimed at supporting and enhancing children's writing processes. The content of children's writing is left up to individual children. Thus, any carnival abuse that does occur--and it does (I share some examples below)--is incidental, and represents an individual student's decision to challenge, parody, criticize an aspect of her world. But there is no systematic commitment within workshop approaches to the development and support of such critical practices by students.[9]

The bite of carnival is blunted in writing workshops, at least in part, by the guiding visions workshop advocates have put forward.[10] In contrast to Bakhtin's images of a subversive, popular carnival, workshops have been guided by visions that are neither playful and critical enough, nor collective enough, to sustain profanation. As Willinsky (1990) has noted, workshops are often portrayed in ways that recommend them as effective preparation for an official, corporate, work-a-day world, rather than as carnivalesque breeding grounds of playful, critical dissent and liberatory alternatives.

> They would, after all, encourage independent and collaborative projects while drawing on peer support networks and conferencing with professionals to enhance the production values of the final and literate product. It can all sound and seem very marble and glass, office-tower work. While the editorial meetings at the classroom publishing house may not be a training ground for the leveraged buy-out artists, neither is it so removed from hustling projects and prospectuses for tomorrow's Wall Street jungle. (p. 19)

Bakhtin's carnival took place in the medieval market square, a site that shared something of the hustle and excitement, I suppose, of Wall Street. But Bakhtin's carnival was animated by a desire for freedom and equality, and celebrated a shared, communal abundance, rather than individual selfishness and greed.

For Bakhtin, profanation was a collective, critical response to an oppressive official world. A second aspect of workshop visions that undermines profanation, then, is their almost exclusive focus on and concern with the individual writer. Workshop approaches, as Dressman (1993) puts it, "lionize lone wolves." The goals of workshop approaches are conceived of in terms of supporting individual children's intentions for writing, and project a vision of empowerment that is at odds with visions, such as Bakhtin's, that conceive of positive social change as the product of individual *and collective* struggle.

Workshop advocates have embraced an individualistic, Romantic rhetoric that abstracts writers and their texts from social context. Berlin (1988) argues that this rhetoric, represented most ably by writers such as Murray and Elbow, *does* provide a powerful "denunciation of economic, political, and social pressures to conform" (p. 486). The problem for Berlin is that while this rhetoric champions resistance to dehumanizing forces and conditions, it is always (and only) individual resistance:

> The only hope in a society working to destroy the uniqueness of the individual is for each of us to assert our individuality against the tyranny of the authoritarian corporation, state, and society. Strategies for doing so must of course be left to the individual, each lighting one small candle in order to create a brighter world. (p. 487)

It is not that individual children do not try to light a candle every now and then in the writing workshop, for they do. There is carnivalesque student writing in the workshop that targets aspects of the official world, and submits them to a playful disrespect and abuse. A fairly direct example comes from one of my students, Rajesh, who made his gym teacher into the main character of a story he wrote. This gym teacher was almost uniformly disliked by children in our workshop--according to them, he was quite mean. In his first draft, Rajesh used the teacher's actual name in the story; later the character's name was changed to "Jud Coat." Rajesh's story:

> Far far away in the milky way galaxy there was a planet called MEAN. The things that lived on it were called Tickyes.
>
> One of the Tickyes came to our planet earth. Now, Tickyes can change shape. So it changed into a man called Jud Coat. He got a job at Clifford School. Jud was very mean! When anybody said Hi to him he would beat them up! And the worst thing was he kept multiplying. So somebody was going to have to get rid of him.
>
> And so I, Rajesh, stabbed him in the brain. ['the heart' in another version]

In his story, Rajesh targets an authority figure for criticism--"Jud was very mean!"--and abuse --"stabbed him in the brain" (a rather severe form of 'uncrowning'?). Within the logic of the story, Rajesh's abuse clears the way, presumably, for a better world, one without the mean and multiplying Tickye, Jud Coat. Thus, in addition to the criticism and abuse of a powerful figure in Rajesh's official school world, the story has something of the ambivalent quality (both destructive and regenerating) that Bakhtin claimed characterized carnival abuse.

Other examples from our workshop were less direct, and seemed intent on testing implicit teacher and school definitions of acceptable topics for student writing. James, for example, told me on one of the first days of school that he was going to write about vomit (Fieldnotes, 8-30-89). Later, he and Ken wrote a story in which the two main characters--Kurt and Lisa (both named for children in this third grade classroom)--went to bed together. (Grace made James and Ken remove this event from their story before they shared it with the class.[11])

I point to these as examples of carnivalesque writing because they embrace--even if without the conscious intention of the authors and in undeveloped form--one of the main strategies of carnival abuse that Bakhtin examines in *Rabelais and His World*. Within the system of carnival images, both the earth and the lower body (the belly, bowels, and reproductive organs) functioned as grave for the old and womb for the new. In carnival abuse, then, a common tactic was to bring the high 'down to earth' or *into contact or association with the lower body*, where the old would be killed, and then transformed and reborn. For example, one of Rabelais' characters in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* says that the shadow cast by a monastery's belfry impregnates women. This bit of carnival abuse works by associating the high, church tower with the low, human body (male penis and pregnant women). Bakhtin

argues that this abuse is not directed solely (or even primarily) at somewhat less-than-abstinent monks. Instead,

> The monastic belfry, uncrowned and renewed in the form of a giant phallus . . . uncrowns the entire monastery, the very ground on which it stands, its false ascetic ideal, its abstract and sterile eternity. (RAW, p. 312)

James and his friends made the carnivalesque move of taking up as topics, within their official school writing, functions of the human body usually censored out of elementary schools, or at least tightly controlled within them (as in sex education). They were young Rabelaises, with the similarity in strategy explained by the continuity of what they and Rabelais were up against--a Western tradition that separates mind from body, and that asks its students to 'look higher' to the things of the mind. If you want to resist such a situation and have a little fun--in his interview, James said that he liked to "make serious things funny" and that he did this "when the day's kind of going slow, and it's really not going, nobody's really having any fun" (Interview, 5-24-90)--then one thing you can do is 'look lower.'

We can even hear echoes of carnival in an official workshop story told by Calkins (1991). She tells of an experience one of her colleagues had when consulting with a school district on workshop approaches. This colleague was met at the airport by a group of teachers who said that they were relieved that she had come, for they had embraced the writing workshop dictum that children could choose their own topics, and it had led to a problem. The problem? All over the school, students were writing about farts. Calkins' colleague told the teachers to tell the students to stop it, and the teachers responded with surprise--they could do that in a writing workshop approach? Calkins concludes:

> We laugh and think, "How silly." But it's not silly. It's sad. The problem is not that kids are writing about farts but that some of us have lost confidence in our ability to think for ourselves within the writing conference. (p. 228)

This is a fair-enough moral to the story, especially given the larger context of low teacher status in our country, and continued attacks on teachers and schools for putting the very survival of our nation at risk. But there is another moral, another problem lurking in Calkins' story. The problem, for me, is that workshop approaches have an impoverished view of the ends toward which children might put their writing. Workshop approaches have traditionally emphasized personal narrative. Children's writing remains cozily wrapped in a Romantic rhetoric that portrays it as "the innocent perceptions of children making individual sense of the world and their role in it" (Gilbert, 1989, p. 199). Rajesh, James and the children writing about farts were pushing writing in another direction, a direction that sought to upset and challenge aspects of their world--a direction that might, with support, grow into mature forms of parody or criticism.

I am sure that the students who were writing about farts were just 'having fun.' But surely part of the fun was knowing that, within the relative freedom of the writing workshop, they had found a topic to write about that made authority figures nervous. Writing workshops created a small space for expressing a part of life that is traditionally closed off in school, and the kids exploited that space. Calkins' colleague suggested that these children should just stop it--maybe so. But this response, and Calkins', suggests to me that workshop advocates assume that once traditional social relations and school tasks are transformed in the writing workshop, students will have nothing left to challenge, criticize, abuse. These advocates tend not to consider the broader social, cultural, and political aspects of children's present and future lives, and pay scant attention to the benefits for children that might come with helping them oppose and criticize aspects of their world (Lensmire, 1994).

For Bakhtin, carnival abuse represented an explicit, collective struggle with an oppressive social order. At best, writing workshops, as currently imagined, might allow individual dissent. At worst, they might shut down even this, because their guiding visions provide no real resource for making sense of and responding to student resistance and opposition.

I have argued that writing workshop life contrasts to the 'second life' of Bakhtin's carnival in its lack of profanation, even as individual students sometimes push their writing toward such an 'abusive' end. In the next section, I conclude my examination of workshops by articulating a problem that is common to both the writing of workshop advocates and Bakhtin's writing on carnival. Carnival abuse, it turns out, is not the only sort of abuse that is possible within the relative openness of carnivals and writing workshops.

## A Shared Uncritical Populism

When the restraining hand of traditional authority was loosened during the actual carnivals of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, it was not only powerful groups and the official ideology that were in for abuse and mockery. Burke (1978), for example, tells of a London festival in 1512 that became the occasion for the massacre and expulsion of foreigners. In certain instances, powerful groups used the openness of carnival to their own advantage; in others, relatively powerless groups *turned against even more powerless groups*.[12] Thus, even as carnival provides opportunities for freedom and equality, and a protected space for antiofficial activity and discourse, it also "often violently abuses and demonizes weaker, not stronger, social groups--women, ethnic and religious minorities, those who 'don't belong'" (Stallybrass and White, 1986, p. 19).

I have been similarly concerned with how children treat one another in the carnival atmosphere of the writing workshop. Workshop advocates have assumed that the classroom communities students and teachers create for themselves in writing workshops will be supportive, productive ones *for everyone*. There is increasing concern and evidence that this is not the case, especially for minority, working-class, and female students (Dressman, 1993). Thus, an important criticism that Stallybrass and White (1986) and others level at Bakhtin's work on carnival--namely, that it embraces an uncritical populism--also sticks, I think, to the writing of workshop advocates. For although these advocates are concerned that teachers take action to help students interact with each other in supportive ways, and their books contain helpful suggestions toward this end, in the end, workshop advocates overestimate (as I did) the effectiveness of such teacherly interventions. They overestimate the goodwill and openness that students have toward one another, especially across social class, gender, and race lines.

My characterization, above, of free and familiar contact among children in the writing workshop, was quite similar to the portrayals of peer relations in workshop literature. Atwell (1987), for example, who writes from her experiences as a teacher of eighth graders, asserts that

> Within the structure of a writing workshop, students decide who can give the kind of help they need as they need it. . . . small groups form and disband in the minutes it takes for a writer to call on one or more other writers, move to a conference corner, share a piece or discuss a problem, and go back to work with a new perspective on the writing. (p. 41)

My worry is that this openness and fluidity is only apparent, that beneath it are more stable patterns of peer relations among children that divide them, subordinate some to others, routinely deny certain children the help and support that others receive from peers.

In our third grade workshop, when given the choice, girls worked with girls, and boys

with boys. And the boys and girls who lived in the trailer park were at the bottom of informal peer hierarchies of status and power in the classroom. The experiences of Jessie--one of the children at the bottom of the peer pecking order--should help us understand what is at stake here, should suggest the importance of considering seriously the peer relations that children work out with increased control over their own work and lives in the workshop.

Jessie was the classroom's "female pariah" (Thorne, 1986), ostracized by nearly everyone "by virtue of gender, but also through some added stigma such as being overweight or poor" (p. 175). Jessie was not small, and she came from the trailer park. Nearly everyone in the class, in their interviews, said that she was the least popular person in the class, and the least desirable to work with. Bruce, for example, called her "idiotic, dumb," John said that she stunk, and Mary that she never brushed her teeth. Only a few children said that they had worked with her in the class.

Grace and I often intervened in verbal fights between Jessie and other children. For example, when I arrived at school one Wednesday morning in February, I saw Robert and Suzanne, among others, yelling at Jessie, calling her "zit face."[13] I told them to stop it, and made a point to walk up to Jessie, touch her on the shoulder, and say good morning. Jessie paused long enough to say hello before continuing her own verbal defense and attack.

These verbal fights continued over the next few days. I wrote in my notes that "Jessie has been doing battle with Mary, Suzanne, Carol, and even sometimes, it seems, her friends Karen and Janis. But primarily with Suzanne and Mary" (Fieldnotes, 2-9-90). Friday, during writing time, I talked with Jessie about a book she had recently published. She refused to share it with any of her classmates.

> I went out into the hall with Jessie, we sat on the floor, and she read her My Friends story. She had on outrageous tights (white with big black polka dots) and a polka dot dress, pink. The day before, she came to school with two piggy tails that stood straight up in the air. She complained about them to me, and dared me to say she didn't look awful. When I said I thought her pigtails looked interesting, she walked away. (Fieldnotes, 2-9-90)

Later that same day, I discovered that attacks on Jessie had found their way into print. When the children left for lunch, I noticed a children's text in the wastebasket. It was a story entitled, "The Killers in Mr. Lensmire's Class":

> When we got into the classroom on Monday morning we heard singing. It was Jil, Jessie, and Paul. They were singing a dumb song that went like this: Let's get together, ya, ya, ya. Mrs. Parker was out of the classroom. Then Lisa shot Jessie in the back. AAAAAH! Jessie said with a scream!

I do not know who the author was, or why he or she threw it away. Actually, I have a guess as to at least one reason it was discarded. The attack on Jessie was not the only one accomplished with the piece of paper I found in the wastebasket. Below the story was a message, written in cursive. The message read: "Mary you'r stupid!" It was written twice, once in pen and once in pencil. On the back of the paper was: "To: Mary." Maybe the author of "The Killers" ran out of paper, and used the empty space beneath the story for a message, which Mary received and then threw away. Or perhaps the story itself was the first message, and was given to Jessie, Jil, Paul, or maybe even Lisa, by Mary, who then received a critical response to her work--"Mary you'r stupid"--which she threw away. In any event, Jessie was being attacked in real life and as a fictional character.

In her interview, Jessie said that she had only a few friends in the class--Janis and Karen (both from the trailer park)--and a few others in the other third grade class. She said she

sometimes conferenced with Janis and Karen and shared her finished pieces with them, but usually she kept her work to herself. Although she published four books across the year, she did not share her books either during sharing time or in the writing workshop library. She did conference with me, Grace, and the teacher aide, often. In contrast to many of her classmates, she looked almost exclusively to adults as audiences. When asked if there were things about the workshop that she did not like, she said, "Some times I didn't like it was when Mr. Lensmire couldn't get to me [for a writing conference]. I didn't like that" (Interview, 5-30-90).

There were other children who seemed to prefer adults as audiences over peers, but most children in the workshop enjoyed and valued conferences with classmates, and shared their work with the class in sharing sessions. In fact, the opportunity to conference and share their work with peers was one of the most positive aspects of the workshop for these third graders. They valued their interactions with peers.

But not just any peers. Children in the workshop *sought and avoided* specific peer audiences in their daily interactions in the classroom. A primary way children accomplished this was in their selection of who they conferenced and collaborated with on their texts.

In general, *children worked with friends within gender boundaries*. All children identified other children they did and did not want to conference with--in other words, they made inclusions and exclusions, and these differentiations were often associated with social class and gender differences. Karen, for example, spoke for boys and girls in the class when she stated that "the boys like the boys, but the girls like the girls" for peer conferences (Interview, 5-21-90). In Mary and Lori's interview, Mary was quite explicit (as were most boys and girls) about who she did and did not want to work with: "I like working with Carol, Lisa, Marie, Sharon, Emily, Julie, and Suzanne. And I don't like working with the boys" (Interview, 5-31-90). Mary's list of girls, except possibly for Emily and Julie, is a fairly complete naming of the most popular girls in the class. She also was forthcoming about girls with whom she did not want to work, and why. Mary said that "some of them had lice, they stunk," she did not like their "styles" or their personalities.

Mary: Most of them, and some of them are from the trailer park and I don't like working with people who are from the trailer park. . . . Like at first I thought that Lori was from the trailer park before I went over to her house the first time.

Lori: Thanks a lot.

Mary: Well I did.

Jessie was from the trailer park, and she decided that it was too risky to share her stories with peers. After identifying children she did not want to conference with, Jessie described how she would feel if she were forced to conference with them:

Intr: What would they do with your writing? How would you feel if you had to conference with them?

Jessie: I would feel like a jar of slime. Being sat on.

Intr: So maybe they don't treat you very well?

Jessie: Yes. No, like getting cut in half. (Interview, 5-30-90)

Later, she said that she never shared in front of the whole class because they would make her feel the same way in that situation. (She resisted numerous attempts by me to have her share

with small groups of classmates.) Her description of how her peers would accomplish making her feel "cut in half" during a sharing session surprised me. I had expected her to predict verbal attacks on her work when she finished sharing a story. Instead:

> Because, cause, for some people, it, nobody would, would um, *answer*, or *ask them questions*. I know that. (my emphasis)

Jessie feared silence, a rejection expressed not with words but with no words, when there were supposed to be words; an active silence. Jessie's comments assumed aspects of the sharing session that Grace and I had worked hard to put in place. If an author asked her classmates for specific help in relation to the piece she was reading, then we expected children to respond to the author's request in their response before going on to other topics--"nobody would answer." If the author did not set up the sharing session this way, we expected children to first talk with the author about what they liked, and then move to questions that they had about the work--"or ask them questions."

From the beginning, I worked to make the writing workshop, and its conferences and sharing times, a safe place for children to write and share their work. We did many activities to help children respond to each other's writing in helpful ways. Grace and I held 'peer' conferences in front of the class in which we talked with each other about our own writing; I led discussions of student texts I had placed on the overhead; we developed guidelines for response that children kept in their writing folders; and children role-played peer conferences in front of the class, which we then discussed and assessed. Grace and I were quite active, at times, in sharing sessions, both reminding children before we started that we needed to respect and support our fellow writers, and intervening during sharing sessions when children seemed unsupportive. Perhaps Jessie's fear of silence reflected her knowledge of the active role we took during sharing--she may have known we would address hurtful student comments, but she was less sure (as I am) that we could address *no* comments, no answers or questions.

Obviously, these teacher efforts were not enough to make the classroom a safe place for Jessie to share her work with peers. When asked why other people felt comfortable sharing their stories in front of class, Jessie said, "Because they have lots of friends."

One of the consequences of Jessie's relations with her peers was that her writing was never shared publicly in the workshop. Most children never encountered Jessie's retelling of "Sleeping Beauty."

> Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess, and her name was Jessie. One day, she was sleeping, and she heard a noise so she got up and went upstairs to the room upstairs. When she opened the door she saw a spinning wheel.
>
> When she was spinning at the spinning wheel, she poked her finger. Suddenly she fell asleep, and everyone fell asleep too. Just then a prince came.
>
> He snuck into the castle and found the princess and kissed her. And suddenly everybody awoke and the prince became an empire.

Bruner (1990) believes that the stories we tell and write "mediate between the canonical world of culture and the more idiosyncratic world of beliefs, desires, and hopes" (p. 52). If I understand him correctly, Bruner is saying that our stories represent a sort of compromise between how we think the world is (given to us in the 'canonical world of culture') and how we, as individuals, would like the world to be. When we tell stories, we both draw on given, cultural narratives about the world and our place in it, and manipulate and twist them in ways that express our 'idiosyncratic worlds.' The twists Jessie gave to a more canonical version of "Sleeping Beauty" (from the Grimms, for example), are charming, and suggest self-importance, youth, movement. Her crowned princess is named Jessie, instead of Rosamond.

Jessie, the author (as well as Jessie the princess), avoids altogether the angry witch who casts a death spell on the young princess, and the good witch who transmutes that spell to sleep. Jessie seems impatient with sleep, so she has her princess 'suddenly' fall asleep, only to be awakened almost immediately by a prince who 'just then' arrived. In the Grimm version, the two live happily ever after together. Jessie's princess and prince may do likewise, but Jessie leaves this open. Jessie, however, is not content with some sort of romantic bliss for the two. Her version ends with the rise to power of her prince: He became an empire.

Jessie's story may also be read against another 'canonical world of culture'--the peer culture Jessie participated in. The rift between canonical peer world and Jessie's 'more idiosyncratic' one is wide, and leaves the peer one looking anything but charming (a little grim), for Jessie. In that culture, Jessie was not beautiful in the stories others told about her. She labored to avoid those who would cast spells to 'cut her in half' or turn her into a 'jar of slime.' The school year was long, and she had little chance of association (nor did she say she wanted it) with the powerful.

Jessie wrote herself and a vision of the world on the page, but others seldom heard her voice or saw her vision, at least not in the public spaces the workshop provided. Jessie thought that those spaces were for people with 'lots of friends.'

Most children had enough friends to make free and familiar contact with peers at least a mixed blessing. But there is an underside to children's relations that workshop advocates have not confronted. As in carnival, workshop participants sometimes use the free and playful space not to work out humane new relations, not to lampoon and discredit an unjust, official order, but to reassert and reinforce ugly aspects of exactly that same unjust, larger society. Abuse in carnival (and the writing workshop) is not, as Bakhtin wanted it to be, solely aimed at worthy objects of uncrowning. Some targets are chosen because they are easy targets, because already uncrowned, never crowned.

## Concluding Comments

I have examined writing workshops as a form of carnival in order to highlight important, liberatory aspects of workshop life, and to identify problems that threaten to undermine its positive force. I have pointed to active participation, free and familiar contact among people, and a playful, familiar relation to the world as positive features of writing workshops that we should affirm. And I have questioned the individualistic and uncritical visions that guide current workshop approaches--visions that provide precious few resources for understanding, supporting, and criticizing the diverse ends to which children might put their talk and texts in writing workshops.

For educators and researchers who are, like me, sympathetic to workshop approaches to the teaching of writing, my work poses at least two challenges. First, we must pay more attention to the immediate peer culture, to social relations among children and the meanings and values they assign to each other, texts, and teachers. The peer culture is an important backdrop upon which children's texts are written and given their local, particular meanings. Workshop approaches encourage teachers to know children, but this is usually thought of as knowing individual children, as if these individuals were not caught up in relations with each other (see, for example, Graves, 1983, on individual children's "unique territories of information," pp. 22-28). I am not denying the need for knowledge of individual children. I am arguing that such a focus can blind us to the ways children are connected to each other, blind us to the more or less shared meanings and values children bring to their activities and texts.

Second, we must articulate goals for our workshops and classrooms that go beyond supporting individual student intentions, and that include a vision of the type of classroom community in which we want our children to write and learn.[14] Workshop approaches have

aligned their goals with individual children's intentions, without considering that the ends some children pursue may not be beneficial for other children (or even themselves). There are bullies on the playground, and peer cultures maintaining divisions among children by class, race, and gender. We affirm these aspects of children's lives when we commit ourselves to uncritically supporting student intentions.

My students and I created a community within the writing workshop, and children's writing emerged from and contributed to that community. The community we created was important for the experiences and learning of the children and teachers there. If, as Harris (1989) asserts, we "write not as isolated individuals but as members of communities whose beliefs, concerns, and practices both instigate and constrain, at least in part, the sorts of things we can say" (p. 12), then we had better pay attention to the communities we create in writing classrooms.

With the help of Bakhtin's work on carnival, I have tried to pay attention. I see in writing workshop approaches the potential to contribute to the creation of more humane and just forms of life in school and society. But there are challenges and issues to be confronted. The absence of Jessie and her "Sleeping Beauty" from the public spaces of our workshop reminds us that transformed peer relations represent both promise and problem in our progressive pedagogies. In the open, engaging, laughing, playing workshop-carnival, students have something to say about who speaks and is heard. We ignore what they are saying at our (children's) peril.

## Notes

1 Pseudonyms have been used for all children, staff, and parents who appear in my text. Pseudonyms have also been used *within* children's texts when those texts name other children or staff from the school. I have also done some minor editing of children's texts (mainly spelling) when presenting rough drafts.

2 Lines did not appear to be drawn by race/ethnicity: The four African-American children in our classroom, and one whose parents were from India, did not form a subgroup--each of them worked and played primarily with white children within gender boundaries. Because I was primarily concerned with the inclusions and exclusions children made with their decisions of who to work with in the workshop, and race/ethnicity did not appear to be important to those decisions, my analyses in Lensmire (1994) do not explore in any depth the meaning of race/ethnicity in the lives of children in this workshop; that does not necessarily mean that it was unimportant--see, for example, pp. 63-65.

3 A brief treatment of Bakhtin's writings on carnival is difficult, because, as Gardiner (1992) notes, "It is often difficult to disentangle what Bakhtin takes to be some of the more salient features of carnival, insofar as it constitutes a complexly interconnected and 'organic' whole" (pp. 45, 46). My characterization is based on Bakhtin's (1984a) own summary of carnival in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (pp. 122-126). I omit discussion of what Bakhtin calls a "special category of the carnival sense of the world"--eccentricity--which permits the "latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves" (p. 123). Eccentricity is closely connected to two other features of carnival that I do discuss--free and familiar contact among carnival participants and a playful stance to the world, both of which function to liberate individual behavior and talk. Other helpful depictions of carnival are provided by Gardiner (1992) and LaCapra (1983).

4 I will emphasize active student participation, since students have traditionally been put in relatively passive roles in classrooms. But workshop advocates emphasize an active role for teachers in the workshop as well--see Calkins (1986, pp. 163-165), for example.

5 I regularly wrote in my fieldnotes about how different children's expressions of affection and trust touched me. As an example, these comments about Rajesh, who came to talk to me one day about trouble he was having with some classmates:

> Rajesh told me he had something "very important" to talk about with me. He said the words with feeling, and his voice broke several times. It didn't seem easy for him to talk to me about what he wanted to tell me.
>
> I like Rajesh a lot. He was one of the first kids I really started liking in the class. He was the first one to play with my long hair and tell me I should put it in a pony tail. He used to come over by me and sit on my leg while I talked to someone else at the table. So seeing Rajesh hurting hurt me too. But there was also a strategic, serious aspect to his words and tone. It seemed he felt he needed to persuade me of what he was saying. (Fieldnotes, 2-23-90)

I am not arguing that writing workshops are the only places such interactions can occur. I am arguing that the relative openness of the workshop creates more opportunities for such interaction, during class itself, than does traditional pedagogy.

6 Graves (1983) even attempts to represent workshop commitments to 'drawing close' to students graphically, in a diagram of alternative roles that can be played by the teacher in writing conferences. Graves affirms the role of "advocate," which the teacher embraces when he "Sits next to the child" and positions himself so as to be "As close to equal height as possible" (p. 98).

7 This does not mean that workshop teachers are actually successful--a number of studies have indicated that it is actually quite difficult for teachers and students to break out of more traditional school discourse patterns. See Florio-Ruane (1991) and Ulichney and Watson-Gegeo (1989) for helpful discussions of this problem.

8 I emphasize playfulness here because of Bakhtin's (1984b) continued association of certain forms of seriousness with the official ideology--an ideology that worked, in part, through inspiring fear: "In the eyes of Rabelais seriousness was either the tone of that receding truth and doomed authority, or the tone of feeble men intimidated and filled with terror" (p. 285).

9 Part of the larger project I am pursuing is figuring out what a commitment to carnival abuse in the workshop might entail. I suspect that work on critical pedagogy (which has been extremely important to my own thinking about the goals and practices of school writing) will be helpful, even though I worry that such approaches might not be playful enough (in Bakhtin's strong sense of the word), and that we might miss the liberatory aspect of playing with ideas and practices.

10 In the following discussion, I concentrate on the writing of workshop advocates and how they have conceived of workshops, rather than confront institutional aspects of schools and classrooms that undermine transformed social relations and tasks. Schools are not necessarily conducive to the sort of 'adventurous learning' (Cohen, 1988) we might expect in more carnivalesque workshops, not the least of which because of the fairly pervasive demand that students be controlled and 'orderly' within them.

11 See my extended discussion of this story, and the two sequels it inspired, in Chapter 3 of Lensmire, 1994.

12 See Gardiner (1992, p. 182) for a brief overview of historical studies of carnival.

13 Oral abuse using "zits"--in the form of "zit face" and "zit man" and "zit fit"--worked its way into several children's writing (see Lensmire, 1993). Thus, children's social relations were expressed not only in their talk and actions within and without the workshop, but also in their texts. An example is provided by Sharon and Carol, who described how certain boys used writing to tease girls in the class.

| | |
|---|---|
| Sharon: | They used girls' names that, that liked other boys. |
| Intr: | Oh, and if- |
| Carol: | I think they used me with David, I'm not sure. |
| Sharon: | They used me with um, Ken. |
| Intr: | How do you feel about that? |
| Sharon: | I didn't like it. |
| Intr: | Why? |
| Sharon: | Because you don't like somebody to use your name. |
| Intr: | What, what can we do about that to change that? |
| Sharon: | I told them not to write it and I told them, and they, they kept on writing and |

> then I told Mrs. Parker and they erased my name out of it. Then they would write the story, they kept on saying that, um, that somebody in the story liked another person. (Interview, 5-30-90)

Boys wrote stories that named Sharon and Carol as characters. Within these stories, Sharon and Carol were supposed to like other boys in the class. In her study of gender relations among elementary school children, Thorne (1986) found that teasing such as "Carol likes David" was a "major form of teasing, which a child risks in choosing to sit by or walk with someone of the other sex" (p. 52), and that such teasing functioned to emphasize and maintain gender boundaries.

In the workshop, children created stories that teased other children by associating them, as story characters, with members of the other sex. They created stories that drew on gender arrangements (as well as social class differences) for their meaning and impact.

14 I sketch a possible direction for such work in the final chapter of Lensmire (1994). I argue for an engaged, pluralistic classroom community, developed from work on American pragmatism by Bernstein (1988), and propose two changes to workshop approaches that I think would help create and sustain such a community: 1) a critically pragmatic (Cherryholmes, 1988) teacher response to children's texts that concerns itself with, among other things, the rhetorical play of children's texts in the classroom community, and 2) an increased curricular role for teachers in the workshop, in the creation of collective writing projects that would help children work critically with texts.

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